

Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida



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BELLE GLADE, FLORIDA

Executive Office
OCT 06 2008

October 3, 2008

The Honorable Michael Sole, Secretary
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
3900 Commonwealth Blvd.
MS 49
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Ms. Carol Wehle, Executive Director
South Florida Water Management District
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, FL 33401

Dear Secretary Sole and Executive Director Wehle:

For nearly a century, Florida families have farmed in the Glades area south and east of Lake Okeechobee. We are – and always have been – an important part of the fabric of our economy, our state and our communities. Through four generations our commitment to farming, to the stewardship of the land, and to creating good jobs and an honorable way of life has been unwavering. We at the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida are honored to serve and represent 47 grower members who run small to medium-sized sugar farms. That's why some people refer to us as "Little Sugar."

When the proposed purchase of U.S. Sugar Corp. (USSC) was announced, our members were naturally concerned about how this purchase might affect their farms, their way of life and the thousands of jobs that they provide and support. That is why we were so gratified by the statements made by both of you and Governor Crist that recognize the importance of continued agriculture in the region, and assured citizens that the U.S. Sugar purchase would be structured in such a way as to maintain and strengthen the remaining farming enterprises.

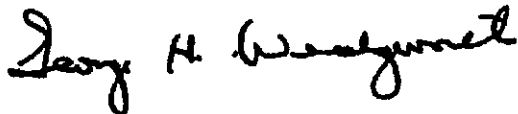
Throughout the years we have participated in and supported efforts to protect and restore our natural environment. We are actively observing and participating in the many discussions surrounding the complex US Sugar acquisition process. In doing so, we have devised a conceptual proposal that advances the long-term conservation goals of the state and the near term economic needs of our growers, the region and the state. It also protects a way of life – where one generation of small family farmers passes onto the next generation the land to farm and preserve.

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In order for our Cooperative of small and medium size farms to remain viable and prosper in a new Everglades Agricultural Area without US Sugar, we would like to augment our cane production acreage by as much as 15,000 acres. Over the last decade dedicated acreage for growing sugarcane has been lost to Everglades restoration projects and alternative uses leaving our facility with excess capacity. We have identified specific parcels that are outside the footprint of all restoration alternatives shown to date, and are in proximity to our processing facility. We are also receptive to a menu of acquisition alternatives in order to meet our needs while advancing the long-term restoration goals of the state. These options include, but are not limited to, fee simple purchase at traditional fair-market value for agricultural uses, land trades or long-term leases. Additionally, the Cooperative's members believe that they may be able to provide the District with certain environmental enhancements that will make this transaction extremely attractive to the State. Since time is of the essence, we look forward to discussing our ideas with you.

On behalf of our small and medium-sized member-growers, we seek a partnership with the state that will balance the long term economic and ecological needs of the region. We appreciate your consideration, and look forward to exploring all viable options with you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "George H. Wedgworth". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "George" being the most prominent.

George H. Wedgworth
President & CEO

cc: SFWMD Governing Board members